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PRRC emerging trends

June 83

© Published by the Princeton Religion Research Center Vol. 5, No. 6

Changing Attitudes Toward Catholics In The U.S. Today

(Speech given by George Gallup, Jr. at the Tenth Anniversary Celebration of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, May 21, 1983.)

Looking back 10 years, much has happened in the world of *attitudes* as well as *events* – both attitudes *toward* Catholics and attitudes *among* the Catholic population.

So tonight, I would like to look back – to note some of the dramatic changes that have come about in the attitudes and behavior of Catholics and among the populace as a whole; and I would like to look ahead, as well – to note some of the challenges and pitfalls facing the Catholic Church in America in the years ahead.

And, as we explore these challenges and possible pitfalls, we should bear in mind that the vitality of the Catholic Church in the future will depend not only on how it deals with external forces in society as a whole, but internal forces within the body of Catholics.

First, let's examine external forces that affect Catholicism – specifically, the levels of tolerance and intolerance in society, or the extent to which Catholics are accepted in U.S. society.

I don't have to remind anyone here that there are still many Americans today who have negative feelings about Catholics and that there continues to be social and religious prejudice toward Catholics. But there is good news from our recent surveys: The level of tolerance in this nation toward Catholics and other minority groups has risen dramatically over the last nearly half-century of polling. For example:

- Far many more Americans today say they would vote for a Catholic for President than did so in previous decades.
- Far many more Protestants today than in earlier years approve of marriages between Protestants and Catholics.
- Far fewer today than in earlier years believe Catholics have too much power in the U.S.
- Far fewer today say they can cite incidents that have made them dislike Catholics.

Prejudice toward Catholics today may be taking newer and more subtle forms, yet these findings, which reveal growing tolerance on a broad national scale, must be considered encouraging.

One key reason for the growing tolerance over the last half-century of Gallup surveys of the American public: the steadily rising level of formal education in the United States.

When the Gallup Poll was founded, in 1935, only about 7% of the adult population had a college background. The proportion today is more than three times as high. And the college-educated segment has consistently been found to be more tolerant of minority groups than have persons with less than a college education.

CATHOLICS CONSISTENTLY MORE TOLERANT IN VIEWS

It is also interesting to note that Catholics have consistently shown more tolerance than Protestants on each of the scales we have used over the years.

We've examined certain of the key external factors in society that will have an effect on the growth and vitality of the Catholic Church in the years ahead. Now, let's examine certain internal factors within the body of Catholics in America. And, in this respect, I would like to talk briefly about the relative growth of the Catholic population in the United States. This is a remarkable story!

In 1947, 20% of all adults in the U.S. said their religious preference was Catholic, according to a series of Gallup surveys at the time. In the latest surveys, the proportion who give their religious preference as Catholic is 29%. Thus the proportion of U.S. Catholics has grown by nearly one-half in the 36 years since the 1947 surveys.

Two key reasons for this growth have been the higher birth rate among Catholics and the increase in recent years in the number of Hispanics who have come to the U.S.

If we were to make a straight-line extrapolation on the basis of this trend, we could conclude that sometime in the middle of the next century, Catholics would vie

with Protestants as the dominant religion in America. And, further support for such a conclusion seems warranted when one examines the religious affiliation of young adults and teenagers. As many as one-third of teenagers, for example, give their religious preference as Catholic, a higher figure than for the adult Catholic population.

In addition to this remarkable growth pattern, another dramatic trend has developed:

For the first time in the history of this nation, the proportion of Catholics in "upscale" groups (upper income and education) matches the proportion of Protestants in these groups. In addition, a higher percentage of Catholics is currently found in the college population than is found in the total adult population.

EPIDEMIC OF 'DROPOUTS'

Certainly these trends would seem to augur well for the Catholic Church in America. But now, after presenting the *good* news, we must turn to the *bad* news. The bad news is that the Catholic Church continues to experience what is called "an epidemic of dropout Catholics."

In the May 15 issue of *Our Sunday Visitor*, Father Alvin A. Illig, Director of the Paulist Fathers' National Catholic Evangelization Association, writes:

> "During the 1970s the total U.S. population increased 11 percent while the number of active Catholics increased six percent. The number of inactive Catholics tripled during this period of time."

Father Illig continues:

> "At the parish level, most every pastor and alert parish council knows that of every 100 baptized Catholics living in the parish boundaries, about 50 of them will worship every Sunday, about 25 will worship occasionally and about 25 will not worship at all."

While the proportion of the population who give their religious preference as Catholic has grown dramatically and appears likely to continue to grow – and while Catholics appear to be becoming increasingly upscale – the strength and vitality of the Church is being constantly drained by Catholics who abandon their commitment to the Church and fall into the ranks of the inactive.

VIEWS OF CATHOLICS ON KEY ISSUES TODAY

Before suggesting various steps that might be considered as ways to deal with the epidemic of dropout Catholics, I would like to take a few minutes to examine the views of Catholics on certain key issues – and certainly an issue of primary importance to the Catholic League is the right-to-life issue.

We have asked a great number of questions on the right-to-life issue and, rather remarkably, we find the views of Catholics and Protestants are not far apart on many questions. When we examine the views of only the highly spiritually committed, we find both Catholics and Protestants to be heavily on the anti-abortion side.

Let me report to you now on one more set of findings related to this issue. In a just-completed survey we find that similar majorities of both Catholics and Protestants favor a regulation that would require federally-funded family planning clinics to notify parents when the clinic provides prescription birth control drugs and devices, such as the pill, to female children under the age of 18.

CHURCH TO SET NORMS FROM WHICH TO DEVIATE

On certain fundamental issues, the Catholic laity appear to be in sharp disagreement with the official position of the Roman Catholic Church. In this respect, it is interesting to note one of the themes that emerged from a series of studies we conducted for the Catholic Press Association: Many Catholics in America (including a significant number of devout Catholics) disagree with the Church on certain key issues, yet defend the Church's position on the grounds that the Church must stand for the ideal or norm. They want the Church to continue to set ideals or norms – to inspire and uplift mankind – while at the same time, they acknowledge the fact that humanity, in its frailty, will deviate from these ideals or norms.

What steps can be taken to reinvigorate Catholicism (as well as other religions) in the United States?

I would like to suggest five steps:

1. The development of new ministries and vocations – for persons of all ages, but particularly for young people. Young people are all charged up spiritually but sometimes have no place to go. Young people in France told Pope John Paul II that they hold to basic religious beliefs but want to know how to put their beliefs into practice. They, like their American counterparts, want to develop a sense of vocation; they want to know how to go about living out their faith.

2. Spiritual counseling: One of the key reasons for people becoming unchurched is that they cannot find a pastor, priest or rabbi with whom they can discuss their religious doubts and spiritual needs. This fact suggests that there is a need to relieve clergy of administrative roles, through lay persons, so that the clergy can be more involved in spiritual counseling.

3. Our religious institutions might also build upon the new interest across the nation in small support groups that deal with a wide range of problems. Columnist Michael McManus, who is, I believe, one of the most perceptive and effective Christian writers today, had this to say in his column, *Religion and Ethics*:

"The one difference I see between churchgoers and those with deep spiritual faith is that the latter meet frequently in small groups with others in fellowship, prayer, and mutual support. In this setting, people can see the power of prayer and make the exciting discovery that God really cares about them personally."

4. We need to strengthen programs of religious education – in the Church, in schools and in the home. The religious convictions and commitment of Americans are often weak because we are unclear about *what* we believe and *why* we believe. Therefore, how can we expect religion to have an important impact on our lives and on society? We are seeing in our nation today a rising generation – idealistic and full of religious zeal – but without spiritual direction and without a knowledge of the very basics of their faith.

Let's examine some survey findings:

As a case in point, eight in 10 Americans consider themselves Christians, but only four in 10 know who delivered the Sermon on the Mount. Fewer than half of U.S. adults can name more than five of the Ten Commandments or the four Gospels.

PRODUCING NATION OF 'RELIGIOUS ILLITERATES'

From these and other findings, I fear we must conclude that – despite the best efforts of our churches, our homes and the religious media – we are producing in America today a nation of spiritually-undernourished and religiously-illiterate youth.

Furthermore, our churches, homes and religious institutions have failed in another respect: They have not created the desire to continue one's religious education in adult years. Religious training for many comes to an abrupt halt in childhood or the early teens. We simply stop growing spiritually.

TWO-THIRDS OF YOUTH NOT RECEIVING TRAINING

But, perhaps we should not be surprised: Two-thirds of U.S. teenagers (and a like proportion of Catholic youth) say they are not receiving any form of religious education or training.

The alarm has been sounded for upgrading the quality of *secular* education, as you know from recent headlines. The time is now overdue for sounding the alarm in terms of *religious* education, which must undergird our lives and which will give our efforts and pursuits the creative energy and divine dimension they require, through both sacramental life and prayer life.

5. And another step that is clearly warranted – a greatly stepped up program of evangelization. I would like to quote Father Illig once more:

"With 19,000 Catholic parishes in the United States and 15 million inactive Catholics, it would appear that about 800 inactive Catholics live within the territorial boundaries of the average U.S. Catholic parish. Unfortunately, a large percentage of U.S. Catholic parishes still seem oblivious to this sad reality even though almost every one of the families in the parish is personally involved. To dramatize this lack of awareness and lack of practical concern, ask yourself this question: 'How much time, effort and money did my parish consciously spend to reach out in love and friendship to invite our own inactive brothers and sisters to come back home?' "

Father Illig continues:

"If five percent of the 19,000 Catholic parishes in the United States had specific plans and programs to enter into dialogue with their inactive members, I would be surprised."

What about the future of Catholicism in the U.S.? There are, of course, many *ifs*. The vitality of the Catholic Church is assured, one could argue, *if*:

- new types of ministries can be developed to appeal to young Catholics;
- more spokesmen and women for the Catholic Church are presented to the American people on television and radio;
- more Catholic youth can be given religious training in special programs in the home as well as in churches;
- active Catholics can increasingly reach out to the inactive;
- Catholics continue to move ahead with pride and confidence in being Catholics.

If these "ifs" are met – and assuming the Catholic League continues its diligent efforts to defend the religious and civil rights of Catholics – it is hard to escape the conclusion that the Catholic Church in America may experience a new era of growth and vitality in the decades ahead.

VOTE FOR A CATHOLIC FOR PRESIDENT?

	Yes %	No %	No opinion %
1983	92	5	3
1978	91	4	5
1969	88	8	4
1967	89	9	2
1965	87	10	3
1963	84	13	3
1961	82	13	5
1960	71	20	9
1959	69	20	11
1958	68	25	7
1940	62	31	7
1937	64	28	8

KEEP DEFORMED INFANTS ALIVE? U.S. PUBLIC IS EVENLY DIVIDED

The U.S. public is evenly divided on the controversial issue of whether severely handicapped or deformed infants should be kept alive or allowed to die.

In a survey conducted by the Gallup Poll, 43% of respondents say that if they had to make the decision, they would ask the doctors not to keep a badly deformed baby alive, while 40% take the opposite position.

While the nation as a whole is divided on this issue, sharp differences are found on the basis of race, religion, education and marital status:

- Persons with a college background lean heavily, 54% to 33%, toward letting a newborn child die if born with a serious deformity.
- Blacks are 2-to-1 of the opinion the baby should be kept alive.
- Catholics are somewhat more likely to favor keeping the baby alive than are Protestants.
- Married persons and women are more in favor of keeping the baby alive than are single persons and men.

The issue is now in Federal court. On one side Federal law prohibits withholding medical treatment and requires hospitals to post notices warning employees that such a practice is illegal. On the other side, many in the medical profession contend that the new government rules could lead to overtreatment of handicapped infants, merely prolonging the process of dying.

Here is the question and the key findings:

When a badly deformed baby who could live only a few years was born in a Midwest city, the parents asked the doctors not to keep the baby alive. Would you take the same position as the parents did, or not?

ALLOW DEFORMED BABY TO DIE?

	Yes	No	No opinion
	%	%	%
National	43	40	17
College education	54	33	13
High school	38	43	19
Grade school	42	42	16
Whites	45	38	17
Blacks	28	59	13
Protestants	43	38	19
Catholics	40	47	13
Married	43	41	16
Single	52	34	14

The results are based on personal interviews with 1,540 adults, 18 and older, conducted in more than 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation during the period May 13-16.

In 6-Nation Survey

HEALTH, FAMILY NAMED AS 'MOST IMPORTANT'

Asked what is important for them among many things in the world, respondents in six nations surveyed by Gallup-affiliated organizations in each country cite "health" in first place and "family" second.

Nippon Research Center, Ltd. (the Gallup-affiliated organization in Japan) was commissioned to conduct the survey for The Youth Development Headquarters of the Prime Minister's Office of Japan. The surveys were conducted between February 23 through March 9, 1981 in all six countries.

Here is the question asked in each nation:

Among many things in the world, what is important to you? Please select as many items as you like from this list which are particularly *important to you.*

Here are the national results for the United States:

MOST IMPORTANT TO AMERICANS

Health	94%
Family	92
Love	88
Friends	73
Religion	59
Work	47
Money and property	42
Nation	38
Family name or ancestors	14

FOUR REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD ORDER *RELIGION IN AMERICA, '82.*

1. *Religion in America, 1982* is an invaluable source of information on religious beliefs and practices in the U.S. and abroad, much of which is not available elsewhere.
2. It provides national and regional norms against which the clergy can match their own churches or synagogues in terms of religious belief, practice, knowledge and stewardship.
3. It provides new and exciting information that can be developed into sermons or articles on the state of religion.
4. It provides data indispensable for future planning: What are the new religious interests of church members and non-members? Where does the public think churches are falling short?

'Squeal Rule' Favored 54% - 40%

The American public favors the so-called "squeal rule," a regulation that would require Federally-funded family planning clinics to notify parents when the clinic provides birth control drugs and devices to females under the age of 18.

Among all adults, support for the regulation outweighs opposition, 54% to 40%. However, college-educated persons, young adults (18-24 years) and single persons oppose the rule by slight margins.

Church members and regular churchgoers are more likely to favor the proposed law than are non-members and persons who do not attend church regularly.

Of particular interest is the finding that Catholics and Protestants hold similar views on this issue.

The regulation, blocked by an injunction before it was to have taken effect February 25, would have required Federally-funded clinics to notify parents within ten days if their daughters under 18 were prescribed birth control pills and other birth control drugs and devices.

ARGUMENTS PRO AND CON

Those who favor the rule argue that parents have a right to know about their teenage daughters' sexual activity. Those opposed believe teenagers who are sexually active would be frightened away from clinics if they knew their parents would be told, and that this would result in an increase in teenage pregnancies.

About 5,000 clinics nationwide would be covered by the birth control rule, and officials estimate it would affect more than 400,000 young women.

Here is the question and results:

Would you favor or oppose a regulation that would require Federally-funded family planning clinics to notify parents when the clinic provides prescription birth control drugs and devices, such as the pill, to female children under the age of 18?

'SQUEAL RULE'

	Favor %	Oppose %	No opinion %
National	54	40	6
18-24 years	46	52	2
25-29 years	45	45	10
30-49 years	55	38	7
50-64 years	57	39	4
65 and older	65	25	10
College education	45	52	3
High school	56	37	7
Grade school	65	27	8
Married	56	39	5
Single	43	51	6
Church members	58	36	6
Non-members	46	47	7
Regular churchgoers	61	34	5
Non-regular	50	43	7
Protestants	57	38	5
Catholics	58	37	5
Men	53	39	8
Women	56	40	4

The results are based on in-person interviews with 1,509 adults, 18 an older, conducted in more than 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation during the period April 15-18.

For results based on a sample of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be three percentage points in either direction.

To be published SOON!

'THE RELIGIOUS WORLD OF AMERICAN TEENAGERS'

A new report, THE RELIGIOUS WORLD OF AMERICAN TEENAGERS, will soon be published by The Gallup Organization, Inc. and the Princeton Religion Research Center.

This report, which presents the results of surveys conducted over the last 6 years by the GALLUP YOUTH SURVEY, offers a unique look at the religious beliefs and practices of American teenagers, as well as their views toward the role of religion in society.

The findings will be examined in the context of teenage attitudes and behavior in general and will include:

- Demographic breakdowns
- Trends
- Charts

The cost of this report is $25.00. However, if ordered before August 1, the cost will be only $20.00, including postage and handling.

Send your check or money order to the Princeton Religion Research Center, Box 310, Princeton, N.J. 08540. If you prefer, we will bill you when we fill your order.

Canadians Today More Tolerant Of Interracial, Interfaith Marriages

Over the last 15 years there has been a steadily increasing tolerance in the attitudes of Canadians toward interracial and interfaith marriages.

The sharpest increase is in approval of marriages between whites and blacks – 70% today compared with only 36% in 1968.

Catholic and Protestant marriages continue to be the most acceptable – 84% today compared with 61% in 1968.

On marriages between Jews and non-Jews, 77% give general approval today compared with 52% 15 years ago.

The question, asked in a survey conducted in March with 1,050 adults, 18 years of age and over, in personal in-home interviews:

In general, do you approve or disapprove of marriages between Catholics and Protestants? Jews and non-Jews? whites and blacks?

The current views of Canadians closely parallel those of Americans on marriages between Catholics and Protestants and Jews and non-Jews.

A sharp difference, however, is noted between the views of the people of these two nations on marriages between whites and blacks, as seen in the following table:

CATHOLICS AND PROTESTANTS

	Approve
Canadians	84%
Americans	79

JEWS AND NON-JEWS

	Approve
Canadians	77%
Americans	77

WHITES AND BLACKS

	Approve
Canadians	70%
Americans	43

EMERGING TRENDS is published monthly except July and August by the PRINCETON RELIGION RESEARCH CENTER. The Center, founded in 1977, is an inter-faith non-denominational research organization with headquarters in Princeton, New Jersey. The PRRC specializes in creative, actionable research, utilizing the worldwide attitudinal and behavioral facilities of Gallup International. The purpose of the PRRC is to gain a better understanding of the nature and depth of religious commitment in the U.S. and abroad and to explore ways this information can enable religious leaders to promote spiritual growth. A one year subscription can be obtained for $30; inquire: Publications Department, P.O. Box 310, 53 Bank Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540 (Telephone: 609/466-1708). PLEASE NOTIFY US OF ADDRESS CHANGE.

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